



rethink Words

Reconsidering Narratives of Trauma and Violence in the Humanities

School of English Postgraduate Conference

Trinity College Dublin – Trinity Long Room Hub

In-person event

9th February 2024

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The way violence is represented always influences its reception and integration within the cultural imaginary. The narration of violence is ingrained in our perception of ourselves and our communities, and those who report traumatic events then carry the responsibility of how they are received and memorialised.

Just as the world emerged from the COVID-19 crisis, the Russian invasion of Ukraine turned the general atmosphere of hope for a new beginning into an even darker and more oppressive state of uncertainty, fear, and sorrow. As scholar Judith Lewis Herman has observed, “[t]he conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma.”^[1] How do newspapers and media reports choose which pieces of information are to be shared with the public? Why are certain stories considered more important than others? On which premises are specific pieces of news discarded? How geographically, culturally, and socially inclusive are these narratives? And, most importantly, when it comes to trauma, how ethical and accurate can its depiction be when told by someone else?

These questions are more and more relevant in the present age, when it has become extremely easy to both share information and instrumentalise or sensationalise it against its original purposes. This topic of discussion, however, has been central to literature and the arts for much longer. As Michel Foucault observed in “What is an Author?” (1969), any writer or artist is the creator of a reality which is at least partly influenced by their choices, a god-like creature who directs the life of its characters. This becomes especially problematic when suffering and trauma are retold by those who did not experience them. The possibility to ‘become someone else’ through a work of art is one of the great gifts of literary and creative expression, encouraging empathy and mutual understanding while helping elaborate trauma. At the same time, can one truly and faithfully narrate someone else’s most tragic memory?

Moving from these premises, **'AfterWords'** wishes to bring together a wide community of young scholars from all backgrounds working on literary and cultural representations of trauma and violence across historical periods, genres, and contexts. What are the methods, difficulties, and limitations of representing and memorialising violence and its traumas? How does violence impact our perception of others, ourselves, and interpersonal relationships? How do we, as young scholars, deal with a world constantly riddled by conflicts, and how can we incorporate these topics effectively and ethically into our work?

Here we wish to offer a space to have constructive exchanges and reflections on these themes with respect to one another and their personal experience. We welcome submissions of abstracts that value intersectionality and interdisciplinarity especially from underrepresented scholars of all ethnicities and backgrounds. We also encourage non-traditional sessions on topics related, but not limited, to:

- Literature on trauma and violence (poetry, fiction, non-fiction)
- Visual representations and narrations of trauma and violence (film, TV series, fine and visual arts)
- Narratives and retellings of colonial and cultural violence
- Racial violence
- Gendered violence
- Homophobia and transphobia
- War and trauma in popular culture and media
- Religious trauma
- Spectacularisation of trauma, crime, and violence through diverse media (e.g. true crime docuseries and podcasts)

The conference is scheduled as an in-person event and will be hosted by the **School of English of Trinity College Dublin and the Trinity Long Room Hub Arts & Humanities Research Institute**. The Trinity Long Room Hub can be reached by public transport to city centre and is fully accessible.

We welcome abstracts of 300 words and a short bio of about 100 words to **pgengconference2024@gmail.com** from postgraduate and early career researchers by **Monday 11th December**. The conference will be held in person on **Friday 9th February 2024**, in the Trinity Long Room Hub at Trinity College Dublin. Researchers will have 20 minutes for their presentations, followed by a Q&A at the end of each session.

[1] Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 1.